PATTERNS OF POWER · THE FLOOR

# The Guard That Cannot Be Turned

*Why the Floor of Force Is Itself a Settlement, What a Soldier's Obedience Is Addressed To, and the Dilemma Every Apex Meets When He Tries to Own His Own Army*

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with Claude (Anthropic) · 2026

*held as tested, not revealed*

# Preface: what this paper is

*The collaboration, the question that produced it, and the promise that it stands alone.*

This paper belongs to the Patterns of Power project and is a collaboration. The questions, the direction, the pattern-recognition and the final judgement are the author's; the synthesis, the drafting and the scholarly retrieval were done with Claude, Anthropic's model, with every load-bearing claim checked against a source before anything was built on it. The method is declared because it is a new way of making knowledge and ought to be visible rather than concealed.

The project asks one question of particular historical orders: how does a distribution of holdings taken by force become an arrangement that armed men will defend rather than contest? How does a warlord's camp become a country? Across a long series of studies it has worked with a distinction between the **anchor** — the shared source of rightfulness that makes armed men into a coalition rather than a scatter of rivals — and the **floor**, the coercive capacity that makes an anchor's verdicts land on the man who defies them.

This paper is about a mistake in that distinction, and the mistake is mine.

The project has treated the floor as a primitive — the hard thing underneath the soft thing, force as the bedrock on which belief is laid. It is not bedrock. **An army is a set of armed men, each of whom could refuse, which means an army has the identical coordination problem the framework was built to analyse, one scale down.** It has its own bystander logic, its own failure mode, which is mutiny, and therefore its own anchor. The floor is not the bottom. It is another settlement, and everything the framework says about settlements applies to it.

The paper does five things.

It states that **recursion**, and shows what follows from it: that command is not a possession but a forecast each soldier makes about the others, and that this is why a piece of paper from three thousand miles away can move ten thousand men without a shot.

It proposes a variable — **the address of obedience**, meaning what a soldier takes his obedience to be owed to — with three settings that can be scored from recruitment, pay and oath records, and that predict how and when a floor turns.

It derives a **theorem about personal guards**, which is the paper's central result and which every apex in the record appears to have discovered the hard way, together with a **generational clock** that says when the bill falls due.

It names an architecture that recurs across unconnected orders — the deliberate running of **two floors at once**, one addressed to the ground and one addressed to the ruler — and explains why the balance between them is unstable in one direction only.

And it identifies an asset no colonial ledger has ever priced: **an army that arrives already settled**, its own coordination problem solved somewhere else, at somebody else's expense, generations earlier.

**The paper stands alone.** No prior reading is assumed — not of this project, not of Ottoman, Roman, Macedonian, English or German history, and not of any scholar named. Every borrowed idea is built from scratch in plain words before it is used.

**One discipline governs throughout.** The subject of this paper is how men are made to kill reliably on command, and its cases include children taken from their families and raised as soldiers, a corps destroyed with artillery in its own barracks, and an oath sworn to a man who used the army it delivered to him to commit genocide. An analysis that finds a design effective has said something about the design and nothing whatever in its favour. This project states that obligation in the phrase *legibility is not pardon*, and discharges it in Part XII at length rather than in a clause.

# The question

*A man who commanded the violence and did not own the country.*

In 1903 Frederick Lugard, British High Commissioner in Northern Nigeria, destroyed the Sokoto Caliphate and announced that every sultan and emir in the country would henceforth be appointed by him. He commanded the guns. He directed the violence. He personally decided who would hold every office in a territory of millions.

He did not own Northern Nigeria. Nobody has ever thought he did. The suggestion is not merely wrong but faintly absurd, and the absurdity is worth pausing on, because it is the whole problem in one sentence.

**Why not?** He had what force has: he could take, hold, and dispose. If ownership is what force produces, the country was his.

Put it more sharply. Suppose the Colonial Office had recalled him. A letter arrives. The letter has no weapons in it. Lugard is the same man, in the same place, with the same voice and the same guns and the same troops who obeyed him yesterday. Yet the near-certain outcome is that the troops stop obeying him and start obeying whoever the letter names.

**Nothing physical changed. Everything changed.** That gap is what this paper is about.

The ordinary answer — that Lugard was a lawful appointed administrator whose authority derived from the Crown and could be revoked by it — is true, and it is a restatement of the puzzle rather than a solution to it. It tells us the arrangement existed. It does not tell us why the men with rifles participated in it, or what would have happened if they had not, or what a soldier is actually doing when he treats a letter as decisive.

And the answer to *that* is where belief enters, and where it enters is not where one expects. The framework has always said that the mass must find the order natural and that the armed elite need only expect each other to act on it. What it has not said is that **the men holding the rifles are themselves running the same calculation about each other**, and that the whole apparatus of oath, commission, uniform, chain of command and paymaster exists to manage it.

So: why isn't the man who commands the violence the owner? The short answer this paper defends is that he does not own the thing he appears to own.

*He commands the violence. He does not own the reason the violence obeys him.*

# The framework, compressed

*Possession, ownership, the anchor and the bystander.*

Everything below rests on a distinction ordinary speech collapses.

**Possession** is what force holds now. Nobody presently able to take a thing is taking it. Possession is entirely present-tense and it expires exactly when the capacity sustaining it expires — at illness, at absence, at distraction, and completely at death.

**Ownership** is a claim about the future and about other people: that this will be mine tomorrow while I sleep, mine next season while I am away, and that when I die you will treat my son as its holder. Ownership is not a relation between a person and a thing. It is a structure of expectations about how other people will behave toward a thing across time.

Force is sovereign over the first and impotent over the second. **The part of a holding that force cannot reach is exactly what distinguishes ownership from possession, and it must therefore be manufactured out of something that is not force.**

## The bystander mechanism

Consider armed men holding only by force. Everyone would prefer a settlement, and that explains nothing, because the question is why any settlement holds at the moment when breaking it would pay.

The decision that governs is not the aggressor's but the **bystanders'**. One man considers seizing a neighbour's holding; his real calculation is a forecast about the other houses who will watch. And each of those houses asks whether this is his quarrel — to which, absent a common ground of title, the honest answer is no. Spending his men on a neighbour's defence buys casualties and an enemy, and if he intervenes and the others do not, he has made himself the next target while they husbanded their strength. So every bystander waits, and each knows the others reason identically, and that shared expectation of inaction is exactly what makes the original seizure safe.

**Warlordism is a coordination failure among the men who might have punished it, not a moral failure.**

Now suppose every holding draws its rightfulness from one source. The arithmetic inverts: letting this seizure stand establishes that holdings may be taken, which is a fact

about *his* holding, so intervention becomes self-defence at one remove — and he can predict the others are computing the same thing, so acting does not expose him.

Call that source the **anchor**. Its requirement follows: **a party competing for the spoils cannot be the author of who gets them**, because a title granted by a competitor is not a title but a forecast about that competitor's health. So the anchor must be unforgeable by the current claimants. And the deep point about it, which this paper will need repeatedly, is that **the anchor does its work on expectations rather than on wills.** It does not persuade the aggressor. It changes what he can predict.

## The floor, as the framework has had it

An anchor says who is right and does not enforce itself. The **floor** is the coercive capacity that makes a verdict land. An anchor without a floor produces verdicts that fall still-born; a floor without an anchor produces verdicts that expire with the army.

That formulation has served the project well and it contains an unexamined assumption, which the next part removes.

# Part I — The floor is not the bottom

*An army has a bystander problem too.*

The framework has treated the floor as capacity: so many men, so many guns, a quantity that either suffices or does not. Written that way it is a *thing* the ruler has, like a treasury.

But look at what an army actually is. It is several thousand armed men, each of whom is physically capable of refusing, walking away, or turning around. No commander can compel them all; he can compel a few by means of the rest. So the question "will the army obey?" is not a question about capacity at all. It is a question about **what each soldier expects the others to do**, which is precisely the structure the framework was built to analyse.

Run the bystander logic inside the regiment.

A soldier is given an order he dislikes — or an order to fire on the wrong people, or an order from a man he suspects has no right to give it. What does he do? Refusing alone is fatal: he will be shot, by other soldiers, on the order of other officers. Refusing together is safe, and might be triumphant. So his decision is not about the order at all. **It is a forecast about the men beside him.** And every one of them is making the same forecast about him.

Which yields three results immediately, and they reorganise the framework.

**First: command is not a possession.** It is a coordination equilibrium. A commander does not *hold* his men's obedience; he occupies a position that each of them expects the others to treat as commanding. He can no more own it than a man standing at the front of a queue owns the queue.

**Second: mutiny is not indiscipline. It is a coordination success.** The framework's word for the general condition is warlordism — armed men in a scatter, each holding what he can and no bystander coalition forming against anyone. A mutinous regiment is not descending into that condition. It is *re-solving* the coordination problem on new terms, with a different focal point. Which is why mutinies are typically sudden rather than gradual, and why they so often crystallise around a public act — the overturned cauldron, the refused parade, the delegation to the colonel. Those are common-knowledge devices, doing exactly what a coronation does: letting each man see the others see.

**Third, and this is the structural claim: the floor is itself an anchored settlement.** If an army's cohesion is a coordination problem, it needs a coordination solution — a focal point that each soldier expects the others to defer to, and which no individual officer can simply seize, because if he could, his seizing it would be worth only his present strength inside the regiment, which is small.

Every army in the record has one, and the components are standard and instantly recognisable once you know what to look for: an **oath**, sworn publicly and collectively, which is a common-knowledge machine; a **flag or standard**, a physical object of no military use whose loss is treated as catastrophic, because it is the visible token of the coordination itself; a **chain of command**, in which authority is derived from above rather than from the person, so that no link owns what he transmits; a **uniform**, which makes the coordination visible on every body in the field; and a **paymaster**, whose location settles a question we will come to.

None of that is decoration and none of it is primarily about morale. It is the same apparatus a kingdom runs, at regimental scale, doing the same job.

So the corrected statement:

> ***The floor is not the bedrock beneath the settlement. It is a second settlement, nested inside the first, running the same machinery on a shorter time-horizon — and it can fail in the same ways.***

And a consequence worth having early: an army can evaporate without a battle. Nobody is defeated, no casualties are taken, and the force ceases to exist as a force, because the forecast changed. Historians describe such events as collapses of morale or of will. The framework describes them as what they are — a settlement failing, which is a change in what each man expects the others to do, and which can therefore happen overnight and to men who are neither cowards nor traitors.

# Part II — The address of obedience

*What the soldier takes his obedience to be owed to, and how to score it.*

If the floor is a settlement, it has an anchor, and anchors differ. The variable this paper proposes is **the address of obedience**: the thing a soldier takes his obedience to be owed to, such that a change in *that* thing changes what he does.

Three settings, and they can be told apart from recruitment records, pay arrangements and the wording of the oath, before anything is known about how the force behaved.

## Addressed to a man

The soldier's obedience runs to a person. He was recruited by that person or in that person's name; he is paid from that person's hand or household; the oath, if there is one, names him. If the person dies or ceases to pay, the address has no referent.

Instances: household guards, war-bands, retinues, and mercenary companies, which are the limiting case and get their own treatment below.

**Behaviour:** maximum reliability against everything except the guard's own interest, and no protection whatever against that. Such a force cannot be turned against its master by any external authority, because no external authority is in the address. It also has nothing external restraining it — a point Part V develops into a theorem.

## Addressed to an office

The soldier's obedience runs to a rank in a chain — the holder of a commission, whoever that is. He obeys the district commissioner rather than Lugard. The office is defined by a document he did not write and his commander cannot rewrite; his pay arrives through an apparatus that continues without his commander; and the oath, if there is one, names the office or the state rather than the man.

**Behaviour:** the man in the office is replaceable at trivial cost, which is exactly what makes revocation work. And a force addressed to an office will follow a piece of paper — because the paper is a public signal that re-coordinates every soldier's forecast about every other soldier, simultaneously. The paper does not confer power. **It moves the expectations that were the power.**

## Addressed to a ground

The soldier's obedience runs, in the last analysis, to something neither his commander nor the state can revise: the faith, the law, the constitution, the Mandate, the nation. He obeys the office because the office holds from the ground, and if the office departs from the ground the obligation is at least contestable.

**Behaviour:** the most stable of the three against ordinary shocks, and the only one that constrains the ruler — because a soldier who obeys the ground can be told by the ground to stop obeying the ruler. Which is a protection against tyranny and a standing danger to the man at the top, and those are the same fact.

## Scoring it

The variable is meant to be measurable before outcomes, so here is the test the framework proposes.

**Ask what the force does when the apex orders something the ground forbids.** If the soldiers hesitate, look for authorisation, or split — the address is the ground, and the floor is *inside* the wider settlement. If they simply comply, the address is the man or the office, and the floor is *outside* it.

And the documentary proxies, available in advance: **whom does the oath name** — a person, an office, a state, or a god; **who pays**, and from what source; and **where the recruits come from**, and specifically whether they have standing in the order they are being asked to police.

That last proxy turns out to do the most work, and Part IV is about why.

# Part III — Why the paper cancels the command

*Lugard answered, and an English statute that made the answer possible.*

Return to the opening puzzle with the variable in hand.

Lugard's troops — the West African Frontier Force and the Royal Niger Company constabulary before it — were addressed to an **office**. Their pay came through an apparatus that continued without him. Their officers held commissions issued by an authority in London that he did not control and could not withdraw. Their oath, and their officers' oaths, named a Crown rather than a man.

So when a letter arrives cancelling his commission, here is the mechanism, stated exactly. Each soldier reads, or hears, a public statement that the office is now held by somebody else. Each soldier knows that every other soldier has heard the same thing. And each therefore updates his forecast about what the others will do — from *they will obey Lugard* to *they will obey the new man*. At which point obeying Lugard is suicide and obeying the new man is safe, for every soldier simultaneously, and the transition is instantaneous rather than gradual because the thing that changed was common knowledge and common knowledge changes all at once.

**The letter had no force in it. It re-coordinated a forecast, and the forecast was the force.**

Which is why Lugard was never the owner. He held a position in somebody else's settlement. What he commanded was not his; it was pointed at him by an arrangement he had not made and could not remake, and the arrangement could point elsewhere.

## The English floor was re-addressed, deliberately, by statute

That answer raises a further question, and the further question has a documented and rather precise answer, because the re-addressing of the English floor was done on purpose, in law, within living memory of a civil war.

In 1688 James II held a substantially larger army than the force William of Orange landed with, and it dissolved without a general engagement. Officers and units went over; the king's own commanders could not answer for their men; and the reign ended. That is a floor evaporating without a battle — the forecast changed, and the change was

about a king who had, in the estimation of his officers, disqualified himself from the ground they took themselves to serve.

The settlement that followed treated the army as the constitutional problem it had just proved itself to be. The Bill of Rights of 1689 declared that raising or keeping a standing army within the kingdom in time of peace, without consent of Parliament, was unlawful. And in April 1689, in response to the mutiny of Scottish troops who had stayed loyal to James and could not be tried because mutiny was not a crime at common law in peacetime England, Parliament passed the first **Mutiny Act**, making mutiny, desertion and sedition triable by court-martial and punishable by death.

The decisive feature is the expiry. Because the Bill of Rights forbade a peacetime standing army without parliamentary consent, the Act was written to lapse — the first one within months, and thereafter annually. **A new Mutiny Act had to be passed every year, and was, until 1879.** Its successors continue: the mechanism still runs today under a modern statute that requires periodic renewal, which means the legal existence of the British Army has depended on repeated re-authorisation for well over three centuries.

Read that through the variable and it is a deliberate, statutory **re-addressing of the floor** — from the person of the monarch to a chain terminating in a legislature — and, more than that, a re-addressing that must be *re-performed on a schedule*. An annual act is a common-knowledge device with a calendar: every year, publicly, the arrangement is restated, in a form every officer can read.

Which is the answer beneath the answer to the Lugard puzzle. His authority was revocable, and his soldiers would have accepted the revocation, because two centuries earlier the English had rebuilt their floor's anchor so that no commander's obedience ran to a person — and had built in a repeating public act to keep it that way.

**One honest qualification**, and it matters. The practical bite of the annual renewal has been much weaker than the constitutional story suggests: the Act lapsed between 1698 and 1701 and the Crown's military power was not appreciably affected, and no British parliament has ever seriously withheld it — in 1784 an opposition considered refusing the Mutiny Bill to unseat a government and drew back. So the instrument is partly ceremonial. But the framework's claim about ceremony is precisely that its content matters less than its visibility: an annual public restatement of who the army belongs to is doing the same work as a coronation, and the fact that it is never used as a veto is not evidence that it does nothing.

# Part IV — The apex's temptation

*Everybody who could, recruited from people the country did not command.*

If a floor addressed to the ground constrains the ruler, then every ruler has a standing motive to acquire one that does not — a force whose obedience runs to his person and bypasses the common ground entirely. And the record shows this attempted, independently, across civilisations with no contact, with a recruitment criterion so consistent that it can be stated as a rule.

**Alexander.** Late in his reign Alexander had some thirty thousand Persian youths trained in Macedonian arms and drill. When his Macedonian veterans mutinied at Opis in 324 BCE, his answer was to dismiss them and to make plain that he had replacements. The Macedonians had standing: they were the assembly, they had made his father king, they could and did argue with him. The Persian boys had none.

**The Ottomans.** The *devşirme* took Christian boys from Balkan villages, converted them, and trained them as the sultan's slaves — *kul* — from whom the Janissary corps and much of the administration were drawn. The original design is the point: Janissaries were forbidden to marry, forbidden to own property, forbidden to carry on a trade, and required to live in barracks, expressly so that they should leave no descendants and have no interests.

**The Mamluks.** Slave soldiers bought as boys, mostly Turkic and later Circassian, brought into Egypt without family or local connection, converted, trained, and manumitted into a military caste — a caste that refused heritability, buying fresh boys each generation rather than passing rank to sons.

**Byzantium.** The Varangian Guard: Scandinavians and later Anglo-Saxons, foreigners in the capital, employed precisely because they had no stake in the factions of the city they were guarding.

**Rome.** The Praetorian Guard: a body permanently stationed at the centre, paid by the emperor, addressed to him.

**Germany, 1934.** On the death of the head of state in August, the oath of the armed forces was rewritten to be sworn to Adolf Hitler personally rather than to the constitution or the state — and alongside the regular army there grew an armed formation of the party, expanding from a bodyguard into field divisions.

## The rule, stated

The instances span two millennia, four religions and every technology from the sarissa to the tank. The criterion is identical:

> ***Recruit from people the existing order does not command.***

Foreigners, slaves, converts, children taken young, men without lineage, men without property, men with nowhere else to stand. What is being purchased is not courage and not even loyalty in the ordinary sense. It is **the absence of an alternative address.** A soldier who has kin in the country, land in the country, standing in the country, and a place in its cosmology can be reached by that country's anchor — by his priest, by his clan, by his sense of what a man of his sort owes. A soldier who has none of those can be reached only by the man who feeds him.

And note that this is the same logic, aimed at the floor, that this project has already found aimed at the seat. When a conqueror must manufacture a native chief, the structurally correct choice is a man the old order has cast out, because a man the old order still holds will answer to it. **The disowned servant and the imported slave-soldier are the same solution to the same problem at two different levels of the machine.**

## And the same three prohibitions

One detail is worth marking because it recurs with a precision that is hard to attribute to coincidence.

The Janissary was forbidden to marry, to own property, and to trade. Those are the identical three prohibitions the Ottoman *kul* system placed on its administrative elite, which is the same design imperial China reached with its ban on inherited office and its rule against serving in one's home district, and which the Mamluks reached by refusing to let rank pass to sons.

The framework already has a name for what those prohibitions accomplish, from its work on settlements above: **sole authorship**. A man who cannot found a lineage, hold land or run a business has no standing that the ruler did not give him and cannot take back. What this paper adds is that the rule was applied downward as well as sideways — not only to the administrators who ran the order, but to the men who held its weapons, and for the identical reason.

# Part V — The theorem, and the clock

*What the personal guard costs, and when the bill arrives.*

The recruitment works. That is the trouble.

An apex who builds a force with no stake in the common ground has produced exactly what he wanted: a body of armed men no priest can excommunicate away from him, no baronial coalition can appeal to, and no rival claimant can outbid with a better title, because they hold no title from the ground at all. He is now immune to the ordinary mechanism by which rulers are removed.

And in achieving that he has created the one armed body in the realm that the bystander mechanism does not reach.

Recall how the mechanism works. An attack on any holding registers with all the other holders as an attack on the ground beneath their own, so a coalition forms without anyone having to lead it. That machinery operates only among parties whose standing comes from the same source. **A guard whose standing was deliberately drawn from nowhere is, by construction, outside the coalition.** When it moves, nothing assembles against it, because nobody else's title is implicated by what it does.

Which is the theorem, and it is short:

> ***A guard that the anchor cannot turn against you is a guard the anchor cannot turn back.***

The apex has bought immunity from deposition-by-anchor. What he has paid is immunity from everything — including from him. He is now the only thing standing between the guard and the state, and he is one man.

## The record

The Praetorians made and unmade emperors and, in 193, put the empire up for sale to the highest bidder among the men willing to pay them. The Mamluks, brought into Egypt as the sultan's slaves, in 1250 stopped being the sultanate's instrument and became the sultanate. The Janissaries deposed and murdered a sultan in 1622 and deposed another in 1808, and had to be destroyed in the end by artillery.

Three orders, no contact, one outcome.

## The clock

The theorem says the guard *can* turn. The record shows it usually takes about two generations, and the mechanism for the delay is exact.

The first generation genuinely has nowhere else to stand — that is what the recruitment was for. Taken as children, converted, barracked, forbidden family and property, they are a body of men whose entire standing is the ruler's gift, and they behave accordingly.

Then they are in the country. They learn the language, they know the city, they acquire reputations. And at some point the prohibitions that manufactured their rootlessness are relaxed, because they are irksome and because the corps has the standing to ask.

The Ottoman case is dated closely enough to serve as the clock's face. In 1566 Selim II permitted the Janissaries to marry. Their sons began to be enrolled; the corps became hereditary; the ban on outside trades eroded until many drew army pay while running shops; the *devşirme* levies became irregular and had effectively ceased by the late 1630s or 1640s, the ranks opening instead to free-born Muslims seeking the salary and the tax exemptions. Within two generations of the permission, the corps was a **hereditary caste with a veto over sultans** — and its first exercise of that veto against a reformer was the deposition and killing of Osman II in 1622, who had proposed to abolish the *devşirme* and open the corps to free-born recruits. The proposal cost him his life.

The framework can state what happened in one line. **The moment a guard acquires a base, it stops being a body with nowhere else to stand and becomes a lineage — and a lineage is a claimant.** Marriage, sons, property, trade: each is an independent source of standing, and independent standing is precisely what the recruitment had been designed to prevent.

Which gives the corollary, and it is the sole-authorship rule again, pointed at the floor:

> ***A personal guard must be continuously re-imported, or it becomes a lineage.***

The Mamluk system is the counter-design and it demonstrates the rule by obeying it. Rank was not passed to sons; each generation was bought fresh. That refusal of heritability is the reason the system lasted as long as it did — and the reason it did so at the price of an unending purchase of children.

## And the cost of removal

One last measure, which shows how completely such a guard escapes the ground.

Osman II tried to reform the Janissaries in 1622 and was imprisoned and murdered. Selim III raised a new-model army at the end of the eighteenth century and was destroyed by Janissary revolt. Mahmud II succeeded only in 1826, and only by provoking the revolt deliberately, bringing modern artillery against the barracks, and rallying the population of the capital against the corps — that is, by assembling a *rival floor and a mass mobilisation* to remove a body of soldiers.

**A force addressed to the ruler cannot be removed by the ruler.** It can only be removed by something that is not the ruler: another army, or the people, or both. Which is the theorem's practical shape and the reason so many orders in the record simply lived with the guard they had made.

# Part VI — Two floors at once

*The architecture that recurs, and why it drifts one way.*

An apex who has read the last two parts is in an unpleasant position. A ground-addressed army constrains him. A person-addressed guard will eventually own him. Neither is acceptable.

So the record shows a third arrangement, arrived at repeatedly and independently: **run both, and keep them balanced.**

Rome ran legions recruited from the provinces and stationed on the frontiers, and a Praetorian Guard stationed at the capital and paid by the emperor.

The Ottomans ran the *sipahi* cavalry, who held *timar* grants of land revenue in return for service — men with a base in the provinces, standing in the local order, and an interest in the legal framework that secured their grants — alongside the Janissaries, who were the sultan's slaves, barracked in the capital, paid in cash from the treasury and holding nothing.

Germany after 1934 ran a regular army, sworn as of that year to the person of the head of government, alongside an armed party formation which began as a bodyguard and expanded into dozens of field divisions.

The design is legible and the logic is sound. The ground-addressed force is large, cheap, rooted, and useful against enemies; the person-addressed force is small, expensive, loyal, and useful against the ground-addressed force. Each is insurance against the other, and the apex is the only party in communication with both. It is, on paper, the correct answer.

**And it drifts in one direction only.** Consider the incentives. The apex faces crises, and in a crisis the force he trusts is the one addressed to him, so he uses it, funds it and expands it. The person-addressed guard therefore grows — and every increment reduces his need for the other force, which he then has less reason to fund or favour. The ground-addressed force decays, and with it the counterweight, until the guard has no rival. The reverse drift has no engine: no apex has a motive to strengthen the force that can be turned against him at the expense of the force that cannot.

So the two-floor architecture is not an equilibrium. **It is a slope with a ratchet**, and the record is consistent with that: the Praetorians outlived the Republic's arrangements and made emperors; the Janissaries eclipsed the *sipahi* and became the state's veto; the party formation grew from a bodyguard into an army.

Which yields a prediction sharp enough to be checked: in any order running two floors, **the person-addressed one should grow as a share of total force over time, and the growth should be monotonic across crises rather than reversing between them.**

# Part VII — The mercenary, and why paid loyalty is the most dangerous kind

*A force with no address at all.*

One case sits below all three settings and deserves its own treatment, because it is the limiting case that shows what the settings are for.

A mercenary company's obedience is addressed to **payment**. Not to a man, exactly — the paymaster is interchangeable — and certainly not to an office or a ground. To a transaction.

The conventional criticism is Niccolò Machiavelli's, written around 1513 and still the standard reference: mercenaries are useless and dangerous, disunited, ambitious, without discipline, faithless; brave among friends and cowardly before enemies; they have no reason to die for a wage. He is right about the behaviour and the framework can supply the mechanism he does not.

**A contract is enforceable only by a third party.** Where a state stands over both sides, a soldier who breaks his engagement is sued or imprisoned, and the contract holds. But a mercenary company is hired precisely in the situations where no such third party exists — a warlord's country, a besieged city, a colonial frontier — and in that setting the contract is a promise between two armed parties with no enforcer. Which is the commitment problem in its purest form, and it is symmetric: the employer may not pay, and the company may not fight, and each knows the other knows.

So the mercenary's obedience is addressed to his employer's continued **solvency and will**, both of which he can observe, and neither of which is a ground he cannot compute against. And there is the danger, and it is worse than Machiavelli's version. A soldier addressed to a ground *cannot* rationally compare his own strength to his sovereign's, because the comparison is not the kind of thing the address permits. A soldier addressed to a wage can, and eventually does, and the arithmetic is not favourable to the employer: the men holding the weapons in a country are usually stronger than the men holding the money.

The classic demonstration is Carthage. After the First Punic War the city could not pay off the mercenary army it had used to fight Rome, and between 241 and 238 BCE that army turned on its employer in a war of exceptional savagery that came close to

destroying the state — and did so, note, not because the mercenaries were wicked but because they had performed the calculation their address permitted them to perform.

**Which places the three settings on a single scale of computability.** Addressed to a ground: the soldier does not compute, because the address makes the comparison unthinkable. Addressed to an office: he computes and finds that the office will outlast any individual, including him. Addressed to a man or a wage: he computes, and finds a single mortal, and the answer is available.

Belief, in this framework, is not an ornament on the floor. **It is the thing that stops the men with the weapons from noticing that they are the ones with the weapons.**

# Part VIII — The floor that arrives already settled

*An asset no colonial ledger has ever priced.*

Return one last time to Lugard, because there is something in his position that the framework has been walking past for several studies.

He needed a warrant for the Nigerians he seated and never needed one for his own troops. His force arrived with its coordination problem *already solved*: officers whose commissions issued from an authority none of them could seize, a paymaster in another hemisphere, an oath naming a Crown, a court-martial jurisdiction resting on a statute renewed by a parliament, and a body of assumptions about what a soldier is and does that took England a civil war, a deposition and two centuries of statute to manufacture.

**A conqueror does not bring men and guns. He brings an army that has already stopped being a warlord band** — and the stopping was done somewhere else, generations earlier, at somebody else's expense.

That is an asset and it has never been costed. Colonial ledgers of the kind this project has examined count troops, transport, ammunition, garrison and pensions. They do not count the settlement embedded in the force, because it was paid for in a different country in a different century and appears in no column. Yet it is the reason a few thousand men could hold a territory of millions: not that they were braver or better armed, but that their own coordination problem had been solved in advance and their opponents' had to be solved on the spot, under fire, by men whose institutions were being dismantled as they tried.

Two consequences follow.

**The first is comparative.** Where a conqueror's floor arrived pre-settled and the defender's did not, the asymmetry is not primarily technological. A defending force assembled from lineages, age-sets or feudal levies must solve, in the moment of crisis, exactly the problem the invader solved a century ago — and it must solve it while the invader is deliberately attacking its solutions, buying its chiefs, and offering separate terms to its segments.

**And the second is a caution about the framework's own accounting.** This project has repeatedly described colonial holds as *cheap*, and has meant something

precise by it: few officials, small garrisons, low expenditure against high extraction. That accounting is correct as far as it goes and it silently excludes the largest input. The cheapness of a colonial hold is partly the deferred cost of the metropole's own settlement, and a conquest that looks inexpensive on the colonial ledger may be a very expensive thing indeed, entered on a ledger closed two hundred years before.

# Part IX — What this changes in the framework

*Four amendments, one of which is structural.*

## One: the floor is not a primitive

The framework has been operating with an anchor that requires analysis and a floor that does not — capacity, quantity, the hard thing underneath. That asymmetry is now removed. **Both terms are settlements.** The floor has an anchor of its own, and every diagnostic the project applies to an order can be applied to its army: what is the source of authority, who authors the titles, can it be forged by a claimant, is it determinate about succession, who interprets it, and what happens at a contested transition.

The practical consequence is that a study which scores an order's floor as *present and adequate* has not finished. It must also ask **what that floor's obedience is addressed to**, because two forces of identical size and equipment will behave in opposite ways when the apex is challenged.

## Two: the operative question is whether the floor is inside the coalition

Everything in this paper reduces to one structural fact and it is worth isolating.

The bystander mechanism works among parties whose standing derives from a common source. So the decisive question about any armed force is whether it is **inside** that set or **outside** it.

*Inside*: the soldiers' own standing draws on the same ground as the barons' and the priests' — which means an attack on the ground implicates them too, which means they will not back a usurper against it, and which means the apex cannot use them against it either. Maximum stability, minimum freedom of action at the top.

*Outside*: the soldiers hold nothing from the ground, so nothing they do implicates anybody else's title, so no coalition forms when they move. Maximum freedom of action at the top, and no protection against the force itself.

That is the same variable as the address of obedience, seen structurally rather than psychologically, and it explains why the two descriptions kept converging in Parts II and V.

## Three: sole authorship runs downward as well as sideways

The project's most operational proposition has been that a settlement holds only where the anchor is the sole author of the armed elite's titles, and that a second author — a patron who can grant heritable holdings — is the ordinary lethal event.

The prohibitions on the Janissary and the Mamluk show the identical rule applied one level down. Forbid marriage, property and trade and you have produced a soldier with no source of standing but the ruler; permit them and you have produced, within two generations, a body of men with an independent base, which is to say a second author operating inside the floor.

So the amendment: **sole authorship is not a rule about elites. It is a rule about anyone who holds a weapon or an office**, and its violation inside the army has the same signature and the same delay as its violation among the magnates.

## Four: the mirror, which is about us

One observation belongs here because the paper's opening depends on it and because it is uncomfortable.

A person raised inside a modern state finds it obviously absurd that Lugard might have owned Nigeria — and finds it entirely unremarkable that *Britain* might have held it. Same acre, same conquest, same guns, same year. One proposition is unthinkable and the other is the ordinary content of an atlas.

That asymmetry is not a fact about the world. It is a fact about a formation, and it marks exactly where the anchor sits: the line between the taking that is invisible and the taking that is unthinkable is the line the legitimating story draws. Which is what this project means when it says a settled order needs no conspiracy. The formation is doing the work, in the reader, while he reads.

**The framework's own vocabulary is not exempt.** This paper has used the word *floor* throughout as though the men in it were a material, and that usage is itself a small instance of the thing being described.

# Part X — Predictions

*Stated so that they can fail.*

**P1 — Forces evaporate rather than degrade.** Where an army's address is disrupted — the office vacated, the ground disqualified, the paymaster gone — collapse should be sudden and should occur without proportionate casualties, and should be preceded by a public common-knowledge event rather than by a gradual decline in reported morale. *Falsified if* such collapses are typically gradual and track attrition.

**P2 — Recruitment predicts turning.** Forces recruited from populations with standing in the order they police should refuse illegitimate orders at a higher rate and seize power at a lower one, than forces recruited from foreigners, slaves, converts or the disinherited. *Falsified if* rootless guards are found no more likely to seize power than rooted armies.

**P3 — The guard clock.** Where a personal guard is granted marriage, heritable entry, property or trade, its first successful coup against a reforming apex should follow within roughly two generations, and should be triggered by an attempt to restore the original prohibitions. *Falsified if* guards granted a base remain reliably subordinate over long periods, or if their revolts are unrelated to reform attempts.

**P4 — Two-floor drift is monotonic.** In orders running both a ground-addressed army and a person-addressed guard, the guard's share of force and expenditure should rise across successive crises and should not durably reverse. *Falsified if* such systems oscillate, or if rulers are commonly found strengthening the ground-addressed force at the guard's expense.

**P5 — Removal of a person-addressed guard requires an external floor.** Where such a guard is destroyed, the destroying agent should be a separately-raised armed force, a mass mobilisation, or a foreign power — never the existing apparatus alone. *Falsified if* rulers routinely disband personal guards using the ordinary machinery of the state.

**P6 — Re-addressing is legislated and repeated.** Orders that durably subordinate their armies to a non-personal authority should show an instrument of re-addressing that is periodically re-performed in public, rather than a single founding act. *Falsified if* durable civilian control is typically established once and never restated.

**P7 — Pre-settled floors are the unpriced input.** In asymmetric conquests, the ratio of conqueror to conquered force should be a poor predictor of outcome relative

to whether the conqueror's force arrived with an established non-personal address; and conquests by forces whose own address was personal or contractual should prove markedly less able to hold territory. *Falsified if* outcomes track numbers, weapons or logistics once terrain is controlled for.

And the architecture fails if this is found: **a large armed force, over a long period, whose obedience ran solely to the person of a commander who could be replaced by a document, without any of the apparatus of oath, external paymaster, or independently-issued commission.** That is the case the paper says cannot exist, because the document would have nothing to act on.

# Part XI — Where this is weak

*Nine problems, two of which could sink the argument.*

**The three settings are ideal types and real forces are mixtures.** A British officer in 1900 was addressed to an office, and also to a regiment, a class, a religion and a nation, and the weights are not measurable. The scoring test in Part II — what happens when the apex orders what the ground forbids — is a good test that is very rarely run cleanly in the record, because rulers who suspect the answer avoid asking the question.

**The cases are selected and they are the famous ones.** Praetorians, Janissaries, Mamluks. Those are the instances everybody reaches for precisely because the guard turned, which is a selection on the dependent variable of an especially crude kind. The many personal guards that never turned are, by construction, less recorded.

**The generational clock has one dated case.** The Ottoman sequence from 1566 to 1622 is documented and clean. Whether two generations is a general figure or an Ottoman one, this paper cannot say, and I have stated it as though it were more than it is.

**The two-floor drift argument may be a just-so story.** I have given an incentive mechanism and three instances, and the mechanism is plausible enough to be suspicious. A serious version would require a series of orders with measurable expenditure on each force over time, which I have not assembled.

**The Mutiny Act reading may be too strong**, and Part III says so: the instrument lapsed for three years without consequence and has never been used as a veto. That is consistent with the paper's claim about ceremony, and it is also consistent with the annual renewal being decorative and the real subordination of the English army resting on something else entirely — patronage, class, the purchase of commissions, and the simple absence of a rival claimant after 1746.

**The mercenary analysis leans on Machiavelli, who had a client.** He wrote as an advocate of citizen militia against the condottieri, in a specific Florentine quarrel, and his characterisation of mercenary uselessness is contested by historians who point out that mercenary armies fought perfectly well for centuries when reliably paid. The framework's version — that the address is computable — survives that criticism better than his does, but the case material comes to me partly through his framing.

**The Nazi material is analytically dangerous** in a way I want named rather than managed. Describing the 1934 oath and the growth of an armed party formation as

instances of a general pattern risks making them sound like an ordinary solution to an ordinary problem. They were instances of the pattern *and* the instrument by which a genocidal state was made obedient, and a framework that can describe the first without saying the second is not adequate to its subject.

**And two problems that reach the argument's foundations.**

*The first.* I have argued that command is a coordination equilibrium rather than a possession, and used the revocation of a commission as the demonstration. But the demonstration works only inside an order where the revocation *is* effective — which is to say, the evidence for the claim is drawn from precisely the cases where the mechanism was already installed and working. In an order where it was not installed, the letter would have done nothing, and we would call the resulting situation a warlord holding a province, and would not have thought to describe his command as a settlement. The theory may be describing the successful cases and calling their success a law.

*The second, and worse.* The whole paper rests on an inference from behaviour to address: I observe what a force did and infer what its obedience was owed to. But the address is not independently observable. Oaths, pay records and recruitment patterns are proxies, and they are the proxies a ruler chooses precisely in order to produce the behaviour — which means they are downstream of the intention rather than upstream of the outcome. If a ruler recruits slaves *because* he expects rootless men to be loyal, then finding that his slaves were loyal confirms his theory and not necessarily mine. Disentangling those requires cases where the recruitment and the outcome came apart, and I have not systematically looked for them.

# Part XII — The excluded, and the discipline

*Who the floor is made of.*

This project requires every study to name the people who were inside an order's coercive reach and outside its settlement. In this paper the answer is unusually direct, and it has been standing in the middle of the argument the whole way through.

**The excluded are the soldiers.**

Every design this paper has admired for its ingenuity is a design for making men into an instrument, and the best of them work by removing from those men everything that would let them be anything else. The *devşirme* took children from Balkan villages — a levy on families, remembered across the Balkans as exactly that, whatever its documented function as a route of advancement for a few. The Mamluk system rested on a continuous purchase of boys, and rested on it *by design*, because the refusal of heritability that made the system durable required buying new children in every generation. Alexander's thirty thousand Persian youths were assembled from a conquered population for a purpose their families were not consulted about. And the prohibitions this paper has praised as elegant — no marriage, no property, no trade, no descendants — describe a life deliberately emptied of everything a person might otherwise have, in order that a man might be reliable.

To call that an efficient solution to the coordination problem is accurate and is not a compliment to anyone.

**And the guards were destroyed by the same logic that made them.** The Auspicious Incident of June 1826 was the killing of thousands of men in their barracks with artillery — men who were, in the great majority, not the political operators of the corps but soldiers and tradesmen who had inherited a position their grandfathers had been taken from their homes to fill. The framework describes their destruction as the removal of a person-addressed floor by a rival floor plus mass mobilisation. That is what it was. It was also a massacre.

**The wider excluded are the people the floors were pointed at.** A paper about how armies are made obedient is, from the other side, a paper about how the obedience was used: on the Bunyoro that Buganda's leased armies broke, on the villages the punitive columns reached, on the Kikuyu the *kipande* was hung upon, and — in the

twentieth-century case this paper cites — on the populations that an army sworn to one man was turned against. The reliability of a floor is a good in the ledger of the man who owns it and in no other ledger anywhere.

**On the vocabulary.** The word *floor* has been used throughout as if the men in it were a material with properties. That is a choice, made because vagueness about mechanism has protected more atrocity than it has prevented, and it has a cost that should be paid once in plain language. The Janissary was a man taken from a village as a boy. The Mamluk was a child sold. The soldier who obeyed the letter recalling Lugard was a West African whose own country had been taken by the force he was serving in, and the framework's account of why he obeyed — that he was forecasting the behaviour of the men beside him — is true and is not the whole of what he was.

**Legibility is not pardon.** To show that a design worked is to say something about the designer and nothing in his defence. And the finding that the most reliable soldier is the one with nowhere else to stand is not a discovery about human nature. It is a description of what has repeatedly been done to particular people in order to make them useful.

# Conclusion

*The forecast that was the force.*

Lugard commanded the guns in Northern Nigeria and did not own the country, and the reason is not a legal technicality. **He did not own the reason the guns obeyed him.**

What he had was a position in a settlement he had not made — a settlement among his own soldiers, each of whom obeyed because he expected the others to obey, and each of whom took the office rather than the man as the thing his obedience was owed to. When a letter arrives cancelling the commission, it carries no force at all. It carries something better: a public signal that every soldier knows every other soldier has received. And the forecast changes for all of them at once, which is why the transition is instant, and why the paper wins.

**Command is a forecast, not a possession.** Which means the floor of force is not the bedrock the framework has treated it as, but a second settlement nested inside the first, with its own anchor, its own bystander problem, and its own way of coming apart. Armies evaporate without battles for the same reason kingdoms do.

From which the variable: **what a soldier's obedience is addressed to.** To a ground, and he will not compute his own strength against his sovereign's, because the address makes the comparison unthinkable — and he can be told by the ground to stop obeying, which is a protection against tyranny and a standing danger to the ruler, and those are one fact. To an office, and he will follow a document. To a man, or to a wage, and he will eventually notice what he is holding.

Every apex has therefore reached for the same thing, independently, across two millennia and every technology: a force recruited from people the country does not command — foreigners, slaves, converts, children, men with nowhere else to stand. It works. And it produces the theorem this paper exists to state:

> ***A guard that the anchor cannot turn against you is a guard the anchor cannot turn back.***

The apex buys immunity from deposition-by-anchor and pays with immunity from everything, because he has created the one armed body in the realm outside the coalition that punishes seizures. The Praetorians sold the empire. The Mamluks became the sultanate. The Janissaries killed the sultan who tried to reform them and

had to be destroyed with artillery a hundred and eighty years later. And the clock runs on a base: permit marriage, sons, property and trade, and within two generations the guard has an independent standing, which is to say it has become a lineage, and a lineage is a claimant.

Two things follow that this project should carry forward.

The first is that **sole authorship runs downward**. The prohibitions on the Janissary and the Mamluk — no wife, no land, no trade, no heirs — are the identical rule the framework already found among administrators and magnates, applied to the men with the weapons and for the same reason. A framework that checks whether a magnate's title has a second author must check the same of a soldier's.

The second is an asset this project has never priced. A conqueror does not arrive with men and guns; he arrives with **an army that has already stopped being a warlord band**, its coordination solved in another country a century earlier, at a cost that appears in no colonial ledger. When this project has called a colonial hold cheap, it has been reading a balance sheet with its largest input omitted.

And the last word belongs to the thing the framework keeps rediscovering in new places. Belief is not decoration laid over force. **It is what stops the men with the weapons from noticing that they are the ones with the weapons** — and every order in this record that forgot it, or thought it could be replaced with money, was eventually informed of its error by its own guard.

# A note on sources and scholarship

*Every borrowed idea is explained in the text rather than invoked on authority; this note gives the references and the reservations.*

**On coordination, commitment and common knowledge.** James D. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," *International Organization* 49:3 (1995), for the commitment problem; Barry R. Weingast, "The Political Foundations of Democracy and the Rule of Law," *American Political Science Review* 91:2 (1997), for the coordination model of rights-policing; Michael Suk-Young Chwe, *Rational Ritual: Culture, Coordination, and Common Knowledge* (2001), for public ceremony as a generator of common knowledge rather than a transmitter of content. The application of all three *inside* an army, which is this paper's central move, is the project's extension and is flagged as such.

**On Lugard and Northern Nigeria.** The conquest of the Sokoto Caliphate in 1903 and Lugard's address setting out the terms of British rule, including the claim that all sultans and emirs would be appointed by the High Commissioner, follow this project's *British Northern Nigeria* study, which quotes the address as a primary document and cites its reproduction.

**On the English re-addressing.** The Bill of Rights 1689 declaring a standing army in peacetime unlawful without the consent of Parliament; the first Mutiny Act, receiving royal assent on 3 April 1689 and expiring in November of that year, passed in response to the mutiny of troops loyal to James II who were not indictable because mutiny was not a common-law crime in peacetime England; the subsequent practice of annual re-enactment down to 1879 and its successors' survival into present statute; and the lapse between 1698 and 1701 without appreciable effect on the crown's military power, together with the 1784 episode in which an opposition considered and declined to withhold the Mutiny Bill, all follow the standard reference accounts and were checked for this paper. The reading of the Act as a *re-addressing* instrument is the project's and the qualification in Part XI stands.

**On the Janissaries.** The *devşirme* levy of Christian boys and their status as *kul*; the original prohibitions on marriage, property and trade and the barracks requirement, expressly so that they should leave no descendants; Selim II's permission to marry in 1566 and the subsequent enrolment of sons; the erosion of the trade ban; the waning of the *devşirme* through the early seventeenth century and its effective end around

1638–1648; the deposition and murder of Osman II in 1622 following his plan to abolish the *devşirme* and open the corps to free-born recruits; the deposition of Mustafa IV in 1808; the destruction of the Nizam-ı Cedid under Selim III; and the Auspicious Incident of 15 June 1826, in which Mahmud II provoked the revolt, brought artillery against the barracks and rallied the capital — all follow the standard reference accounts and were checked for this paper. Casualty figures for 1826 vary widely between sources and are given here only as "thousands."

**On the Mamluks, the Varangians and the Praetorians.** The purchase and training of Mamluk slave soldiers, their refusal of heritable rank, and the seizure of the Egyptian sultanate in 1250; the recruitment of the Varangian Guard from Scandinavians and later Anglo-Saxons; and the Praetorian Guard's role in imperial successions, including the auction of 193, follow the standard record. This project's earlier work on the Mamluk installation of a caliph in Cairo is treated in its own studies.

**On Alexander.** The training of some thirty thousand Persian youths in Macedonian arms and the mutiny at Opis in 324 BCE follow the standard accounts, which derive from Arrian and Plutarch and are contested in detail; the numbers are given as the sources give them.

**On Germany, 1934.** The rewriting of the armed forces' oath in August 1934, on the death of the head of state, to name Adolf Hitler personally, and the growth of an armed party formation from a bodyguard into field divisions, follow the standard record. The analytical caution in Part XI applies.

**On mercenaries.** Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince* (c. 1513), chapters 12 and 13, and the *Discourses*, for the argument that mercenary arms are useless and dangerous; his position is that of an advocate for citizen militia in a specific Florentine quarrel and is contested by later historians, which is noted in Part XI. The Carthaginian Mercenary or Truceless War of 241–238 BCE follows the standard record, principally Polybius, and this project's own Carthage study.

**On the framework applied.** Possession and ownership, the anchor, the floor, the bystander mechanism, sole authorship of title and the interpreter class are developed across this project's theoretical papers and case studies and are restated here in compressed form so that this volume stands alone. The finding that a manufactured intermediary is best recruited from the prior order's outcasts, used in Part IV, is from *What the Conqueror Cannot Author*; the accounting of colonial cheapness qualified in Part VIII is from *No Empty Ground* and the colonial studies underlying it.

**On what is not attempted.** This paper makes no claim to original historical research in Ottoman, Roman, Macedonian, English or German history, all of which it

enters as a visitor. Its contribution is analytical: to remove an unexamined asymmetry in this project's own framework by showing that the floor of force is a settlement rather than a primitive, to propose a variable that can be scored from recruitment, pay and oath, to state a theorem about personal guards with a generational clock, to name an architecture that recurs and the direction in which it drifts, and to identify an input the project's colonial accounting has been omitting. It supersedes none of the earlier papers, which are left standing as written, so that the advance remains visible as something the evidence forced.